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THE
Lord Bishop of *BRISTOL*'s
S E R M O N

Before the RIGHT HONOURABLE
House of L O R D S,

On *Monday, January 30, 1757.*

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SERMON

Lord Bishop of Bristol

SERMON

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House of Lords

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S E R M O N

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Preached before the Right Honourable the

Lords SPIRITUAL and TEMPORAL in
Parliament assembled,

IN THE

Abbey-Church, *Westminster*,

On *Monday*, *January* 31, 1757.

BEING THE

Day appointed to be observed as the Day of the
Martyrdom of King CHARLES I.

Home
R. Conybeare BY
JOHN, Lord Bishop of *BRISTOL*.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. RIVINGTON and J. FLETCHER, at the
Oxford Theatre, in *Pater-noster Row*. 1757.

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Die Martis 1 Feb. 1757.

Ordered,

BY the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of *Bristol*, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday, in the Abby-Church, *Westminster*; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

Ashley Cowper, Cler. Parliamentor.



JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,
choose ye this day whom you will serve.*

TH E S E words were spoken by Joshua to the children of Israel on a very solemn occasion. He was old, and stricken in age; and this day, Ch. xxiii. 1. says he, *I am going the way of all the earth.* Ver. 14. He therefore gathered all the tribes of Israel, Ch. xxiv. 1. to Sechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua spake unto the people in the name of the Lord God of Israel.----He recounted to them all the marvellous works God had done for them;--his promises of future blessings, if they continued stedfast in his covenant; his threat-

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Ver. 14.

nings, if rebellious.---*Now therefore, says he, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth, and put away the Gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And, if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom you will serve.*

That such a choice could so solemnly be put to creatures in a human shape, that called themselves rational, namely, whether they would bow down to stocks and stones, rather than to the great God of heaven and earth; this surely must convey to us an astonishing intimation of their stupidity and depravity.---But Joshua knew the genius of his people too well;--he knew how absurd a choice (without his placing the objects so full before their eyes) they were capable of making; and we, who are now astonished at their folly and depravity, are therefore only astonished because we do not
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know our own. Human nature is the same in all ages, and ignorance is ignorance in whatever shape it appears; the fashion only varies, the thing itself is the same. To prefer an idol to God is not the sin of the present age, it is not the garb in which modern ignorance would choose to dress itself; but in a different sense---to worship the creature rather than the creator---to choose the service of Mammon rather than the service of God---this is a choice we are now, in this enlightened age, as capable of making as the Israelites were of Idolatry in the days of Joshua.

But, in reality, the choice here proposed to them by Joshua comprehended more under it than merely a choice of Religion;--it implied also a choice of Government---for--*to serve the Lord*, implied a submission to the laws of God, as prescribed to them by his servant Moses---a submission to the esta-

blished Government and Constitution both in Church and State : so that the question in its full extent was this--Whether they would choose a superstitious idolatrous worship, under an arbitrary despotick Government, such as was established in Egypt; or--whether they would serve the Lord their God in sincerity and truth, under an equal and just Government, prescribed to them by God himself, and rendered happy by his more immediate care and protection?

Such being the sense and import of the words of Joshua---the question contained in them, namely, whom they would serve---what form of government they would choose---is a question, as apposite and important to be put to us of this nation, as it was to the Israelites. It has in fact been already put to our Ancestors, at different periods of our History ; but at no period of time, so remarkable for the choice made, as on that
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day which gave occasion to the *present Solemnity*. I shall therefore in the following discourse,

First, Consider the nature of the choice then made.

Secondly, What instructions may from thence be drawn for our own conduct, and the publick good.

I confine my enquiry to *this particular day*, first, because the steps taken antecedent to it by both parties, the rise, progress, and continuance of the war, (whether from choice or not) were not the choice I am now speaking of, but rather a kind of national debate and contention for the power of making a choice whom they would serve,--to what Form of government they would submit.----*Secondly*, because the national guilt, which we are now assembled to deprecate, more particularly belongs to *this day*: for, had it not been for this--had the constitution been then established on its just basis,

basis, the many faults and even crimes committed, during the course of the debate, might have all been sunk in the common stock of national weakness and infirmity, without blotting our Calendar with an everlasting Fast.

The *Contention itself*, considering the importance of the object, was natural, unavoidable, and, in some sense, justifiable. The question was such, that honest and good men, with the most upright intentions, might be engaged on either side; they might mean the Good of their country, though they saw it in different lights.

In regard to the King---the very earliest Principles instilled into him by his Father, his courtiers, his instructors, his friends, and counsellors, of whom he had the highest opinion, unhappily for him, were Principles tending to Despotism: what wonder if
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such education, and such authority, had weight sufficient to influence the opinion of a young Prince, and actually persuade him that he had such rights vested in him as were attributed to him. There is nothing new in this, absurder notions have been embraced on less Authority. Now, if this really was the case, we need no more to excuse him, and justify those that opposed him.

For, in this view, the power assumed by the King was considered by him as a just power, in the exertion of which consisted his liberty as King: he therefore claimed and defended it. His opposers, on the other hand, very justly considered,--that a claim to such power was inconsistent with their rights, and destructive of their liberty as subjects. They opposed his claim therefore, and watched the tendency of his principles, in their own defence.

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Thus far both may be supposed to act from the same principle in human nature, which, if just in one, could not be unjust in the other : for the only question put to each, at first, was---Will you, without contending, give up what you are sincerely persuaded is your just right?----But, in the course of the debate, questions far more interesting and important were put both to the King and to those that opposed him.--To the King----Will you risque your crown and life itself, rather than recede from what you think your right?---To the people---Will you serve your lawful Sovereign according to the established laws and constitution of your country, or---chuse you rather to serve any other master, whom chance, caprice, or violence, may hereafter set over you ?

How these questions were respectively deter-

determined, is sufficiently known. The King, committing his cause to heaven, chose even to recede from his acknowledged just rights. But how did his subjects chuse? It seemed evil unto them to serve their lawful sovereign on any terms; they chose therefore to dethrone, imprison, arraign, condemn, and murder him: it seemed evil unto them to preserve the being of that very constitution, the defence of which was the only pretended cause of taking arms against their sovereign--they chose rather to destroy it. This choice was now in their power to make, and they made it: our business is to enquire into the nature of the choice thus made.

And here we should be led to enquire wherein consisted either the justice, or the wisdom of the choice.

As to the first---it seems rather absurd to

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name the word--Justice---on a day whereon we are assembled to humble ourselves before God, on account of its acknowledged wickedness and injustice.

But wherein then consisted the wisdom of the choice? This perhaps has been less considered, and it deserves attention.

To judge of this, we ought to know what ends they had in view, and by what means they could wisely hope to attain them.

As to the ends proposed---these, doubtless, were as various as the passions, opinions, abilities, and interests of the parties concerned; for, though all might agree in one and the same publick pretence, it would be absurd to suppose them all acting from the same private motives---those who led, and those who followed, those who had abilities to think and scheme for themselves, and

and those who thought only as they were taught to think, and acted only as they were acted upon. Men of this last character compose the bulk of every sect and party into which mankind is divided.

In the case before us---whatever motives of policy might be supposed to influence the leaders to make a choice like this, we should be very unjust to accuse the people of acting from the same policy. They had been amused and inflamed with certain words and sounds, had been pursuing a something, they knew not what, a Shadow of Liberty which their leaders held out to them, and vainly hoped on this Day to attain the Substance. Now if wisdom of any kind can be suspected in these, it must consist in the choice of masters whom they would serve, the choice of guardians to protect Liberty. And who were these masters chosen? these guardians of Liberty?

---the leaders of a lawless Army, and a lawless Parliament.——Could the choice of the Israelites have been more stupid and absurd, in choosing Baal, and Dagon, and Ashtaroth, for their lords and masters ?

In regard to the leaders themselves, the case was different : whatever their casuistry might be, or their notions of Government, stupidity made no part of their character ; they were doubtless men of very superior abilities : and yet---if there was one honest man among them, who could really mean to establish the Liberty of his country, his wisdom, in this particular, was as much to be questioned as that of the most ignorant of the people. For when matters were brought to this crisis, the state of the case was such, as, perhaps, admitted not of a single scheme, that wisdom could form, for the sure attainment of any views:—the Constitution was dissolved ; no Law, but that
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of force subsisted, and that force stood collected in the body of an army ; a power doubtless most wisely adapted to pull down a free Constitution : but wherein consisted the wisdom to expect, by means of the same power, to build one up again ? They had hitherto indeed been united in removing obstacles in the way to this power ; but when these were broken down, what barrier could wisdom oppose to stop the torrent ? It was folly to expect the same unanimity, either in sharing equally the power usurped, or in restoring Liberty to their country, that there had been in overturning it. Wisdom had then no part to act, but to suspend its judgment as to consequences. There was but one certain conclusion to be drawn——namely—that Tyranny, in some shape or other, must necessarily rise up—but, in what particular shape, surpassed the wisest to determine ; even Cromwel himself could not then be sure that it would rise at last in
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his own person. His success rested on the most unstable foundation, the caprice, phrenzy, and enthusiasm of the soldiers. Superior and daring as it was, his genius could not insure a coincidence of events which should place him absolute at the Helm, enable him to steer the madness of the people, and drive it to a certain point ---with---*hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.*

But be this as it will----that all the rest should become slaves to the arbitrary will of one despotick master, 'was certainly not the choice of any one of them; they had formed no such plan: they thought only to shake off a yoke, to change a master, not considering what new master might rise up in his place. That idea was left vague and indeterminate. Perhaps it never occurred, or, if it did, they could not fix it. They knew not---they could not find out a mas-

ter---but a master soon found out them.---
 This was not the result of choice, but necessity ; they had been free to forge their own chains, but not to determine who should rivet them.

But it is vain to seek for wisdom in schemes which could have no other foundation, but in the confusion, distress, and instability of the times. Upon the whole, it seems as if God had blinded their eyes, that they should not see the most obvious consequences, or discover the most glaring impositions : for what an infatuation must have been poured out on every one of them, to trust their Interests and Liberty in the hands of each other?—the leaders to trust the people, or the people the leaders, when each must be conscious that they had all respectively been false to their professions—had been promising Liberty, and usurping Power---had been praying and fighting for
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what they called their just Rights, and at the same time had arbitrarily overturned the Constitution itself, on which alone every legal Right depended.

Thus much for the wisdom of the choice made on this day.----

Whether the nation became afterwards more powerful and respectable, is not my present business to enquire. On *this* Day, at least, the event could not be known : but whatever it was----however formidable we became as a nation, under the despotick Sway of a private Subject erected into a Tyrant,----no Friend of Liberty would ever choose to make his Country formidable at the expence of Liberty itself. Whatever be the wisdom of a choice like this, we must resign it to the Friends of arbitrary Power.

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I proceed therefore to enquire, secondly, what instructions may from hence be drawn for our own Conduct, and the publick Good.

I cannot say that the circumstances of the present times are similar to those I have been mentioning.----We are all in the full enjoyment of our civil and religious Rights, and should blush to hint at danger to our Liberties from the Crown. But we are not therefore without our Dangers: Superstition and despotick Power *on the other side the flood*, and at home our own Vices combined against ourselves----these are the dangers, and these the masters which now offer themselves. *If it seem evil then unto us to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth-----to* preserve our present happy Constitution in Church and State, might not a Joshua speak to us also in the name of the Lord God of Israel, *Choose you this day whom you will serve.*

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There is not perhaps a man in this kingdom that does not think himself qualified to make a wise choice of the master whom he would serve. Our ancestors thought the same; but they taught us a truth that ought to humble us, namely, that though to choose belongs only to intelligent, free agents, yet that there is no choice so absurd which from ignorance, caprice, or depravity, we are not capable of making.----Wherever these prevail there is always danger, more or less, of making a foolish, wicked, or destructive choice.----For instance----Should infidelity prevail in this nation, and a total indifference what Religion is professed, or whether any at all---can any one say how absurd a choice might be made of a Defender of the Faith, by those who have no Religion, no Faith at all? And yet the very existence of our present happy Constitution, as by Law established, depends on a Defender of our Protestant Faith.

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The wisdom of every nation consists in a choice of means the most conducive to its own support and security ; and the choice of means will always correspond to the character of those that choose them. With whom then can the wisdom of a nation be supposed to reside ? or who are the persons proper to direct the choice ?----superiors or inferiors ?---the wise or the ignorant ?---the virtuous or the profligate ?---Now in every nation the ignorant are always, in point of number, far superior to the wise ; in every nation therefore the far greater number are always capable of making a very ignorant choice, especially in matters which regard the interests of the whole ; these cannot be the counselours, in the multitude of whom consists the wisdom of a State. Providence therefore, for the better conduct of human affairs, and not approving, or intending that ignorance should dictate and

prescribe Laws to knowledge, has in part provided against this evil, by disposing the minds of the ignorant to accept instruction, and the minds of the more knowing to give it conscientiously. While this natural subordination subsists, and knowledge, joined with integrity, presides, a nation has all the strength and security that the nature of things admits of. But Vice, either in the people or their leaders, is alone sufficient to invert this order. The leaders may deceive the people, or the people *despise Dominion*; and, when either is the case, when either vice presides, or ignorance instructs, a nation has no choice but of ruin and desolation.

It imports us then to consider---whether this just and natural subordination does in fact subsist among us---whether vice is not erecting itself into a governing principle, and whether both Vice and Ignorance are
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not contending for Rights, which, in the nature of things, cannot belong to them. — If this, to any great degree, be the present state of this nation, every good man, every lover of his Country, has reason to be alarmed. — For Vice, whether with knowledge or without, leads directly to Slavery. Its first principle is — to be arbitrary — to indulge itself without controul — to be restrained by nothing. — In consequence of this principle, every vicious man has a right and ought to be absolute. But the principle destroys itself : — for if Vice was to become general, the Vices of one man must necessarily interfere with the Vices of another, so that the gratification of none could be unlimited. Some power then must be called in to fix bounds to each, and what power could fix them ? Not the powers of Reason, Justice, or Religion ; to these they own no subjection. What other power then but superior force ? To this they must appeal,

peal, and to this they must submit, whether just or unjust. But what is superior force unsupported by Reason, Justice, and Religion? Is it not Tyranny? and are not those Slaves, and ought not those to be Slaves, who allow no other master, are fit for no other master, and are at last forced to submit to this master, through the necessary tendency of their own principles?

When the choice therefore is put to us of Liberty or Slavery, of Superstition or true Religion, can we trust Vice with so important a choice? Every wicked man, whether he knows it or not, is the enemy not of Religion only, but of Liberty. Whoever has sold his Conscience has sold his Liberty, and, if he is consistent with his principles, will also sell his Country to the best bidder.

But there is another Truth no less alarming,

ing, which the present Solemnity reminds us of, namely——That a free nation, even in the pursuit of Freedom, may be brought to such a state, wherein neither wisdom can advance to save it, nor violence dare retreat from destroying it.

This was actually the case on this very Day. God forbid it should ever, in any future period, be again the state of this nation ! It is still, thank God, in our own choice to suspend our ruin ; we are not out of the reach of wisdom to save us, but neither are we out of the reach of our own vices to ruin us. The present hour is perhaps our own, let us choose wisely ; but let us remember also, that, whether we choose or not, the course of nature moves invariably on to the certain production of effects, according to the principles on which we act, whether they be good, or whether they be evil : if evil---a time must come when a
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choice will no longer be in our power--*whom we will serve*. We may repent of Folly, but not redress the Evil. This seems to be the settled order of things in this world, an established way of God's dealing with the children of men: he sets before them Good and Evil, with their respective consequences, and bids them choose. In proportion as they choose Evil, the choice of Good is gradually contracted and withdrawn, till no choice is given, that is, till they are utterly abandoned by the Grace of God, and given up to Perdition. This is the case of particulars; it is the same in regard to nations; they also have their day, and their choice given them; the way to glory and prosperity, the way to shame and destruction. The Jews, as a nation, experienced this through the whole course of their history: national guilt, and national calamity were inseparable. Other causes and circumstances may sometimes concur, and terminate in the same end

end—but the sure and certain period fixed for every nation on earth, when a choice is no longer given, is the time when they have filled up the measure of their iniquity. This was evidently the case of Jerusalem, when our Saviour foretold, and so compassionately pronounced its ruin. *When he was come* Luke xix. 41. *near---he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

To conclude---We are at present happy under the mild Government of the most gra-

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cious and best of Kings. Virtue and Obedience on our part is the only return we can make to Heaven, the only trust we can repose in Providence for the continuance of national Blessings. If we know *the things that belong to our peace*, it is our own fault if we have them not in the most ample manner: nothing but our own Vices can hide them from our eyes. Every man's Rights, and every man's Liberty, is marked out to him in the reason and nature of things, and secured to him by the Laws of God and his country. Would we extend our Rights, or our Liberty beyond these bounds? The attempt is wickedness, the result--anarchy and confusion. We may all be free, (it is the intention of just Government to make us so,) or, we may all be Slaves, (it is the necessary consequence of Vice,) but we cannot all be arbitrary, we cannot all be Dictators?—It is impossible for each to make his own will the standard
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of Right, or his Ignorance the presiding wisdom of his Country. We must submit to some master, whether we choose it or not ; it is the law of nature and necessity, and, if we choose not the servile yoke of a foreign, despotick master, we must each in our respective stations unite in the service of that gracious Master, whom the Providence of God has in mercy set over us.

Are we threatened with dangers?--our divisions will not lessen them ; by forcing ourselves out of our ranks we cannot repel them. We must necessarily be held together by some common band, or be broken to pieces. What bands then shall we choose, or of what shall we deem ourselves worthy? ----Not those which are proper only *for the horse and mule that have no understanding* ; ----they must be such as can be laid on the rational part of our nature---the bands of Virtue and Truth, of Conscience and Religion,

gion, of Gratitude to our King, and Love for our Country; under the sacred tie of these just obligations we shall stand collected in strength to defy our enemies; the strength of order, and wise direction,--the strength of union in a good cause,--and (what alone can secure our happiness both now and for ever) the strength of Faith and confidence in that Almighty Being, who *ruleth with his power* in the kingdoms of this world, and who, for the reward of those that through Faith in his revealed will have chosen him for their God, has prepared an everlasting kingdom in the world to come, *through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

F I N I S.

